

THE KEY TO A BRIGHTER, HAPPIER, HEALTHIER CLASSROOM

A Primary Teacher's Guide to Improving Children's
Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Chapter 2

Step one in the nine step process focuses on eating for energy, health and learning.



Q. How does nutrition affect mental health and total wellness?

Poor food choices containing high fat, sugar and caffeine can negatively affect mood, energy levels and sleep patterns due to sugar and caffeine highs and lows during the day, leading to periods of fatigue, brain fog and agitation in class. Poor diet can also lead to excessive weight gain which can negatively impact on confidence, motivation and happiness. Diabetes, cancer and heart disease are just a few of the serious physical health implications linked to being overweight or obese, however being overweight can also become a barrier to children being more active which we know will play a big part in creating a brighter, happier, healthier classroom.

Good fuel is essential for growth, energy and development. So inspiring good food choices as early as possible in a child's life can only be a good thing. However, this is made difficult as temptation is around every corner and poor choices are made for convenience. Children are not born with an aversion to eating their greens, conditioning happens over time as children are exposed to unhealthy food choices. Therefore, it is possible to reprogram your children's food cravings so that they crave healthier foods instead.

Children need discipline in all areas of life so they can learn and grow safely. The word discipline comes from "disciples" or what we now call learners. Therefore, as a parent or educator it is part of our job to teach children about looking after their health.

DAILY healthy, nutritious food can have a huge effect on a child's mental and emotional wellbeing, helping to manage conditions such as depression, anxiety and ADHD. If children you teach are suffering from mental health issues, eating for health can help your child to manage the symptoms and take control of their health.

Children are starting to form their own likes and dislikes from an early age so as teacher with up to 30 children to consider, you may think you have got your work cut out.

Let's move on to the basics. I've studied nutrition and health most of my adult life and

understand how frustrating it is to help others to make better choices for themselves every day, not just for a short time frame.

As most children love treats, most would gladly choose chocolate over broccoli. To be fair, so would I, but the difference is, I have **learned** that chocolate should be eaten in small quantities as a **TREAT**, not the major contributor of my nutritional intake because of the negative effect it can have on my energy, my mood and my waistline.

As the educator it's important to give children choices to avoid any power struggles, as children will kick against the idea of **what they want versus what they need**. They WANT sugar as it tastes nice, however they NEED to eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, protein, good fats and slow releasing carbs to keep them healthy and strong.

The main thing is to get the key messages across using fun resources and games, leading to them creating their OWN healthy meal plan from the **foods they enjoy**. So, choice is important, nothing age appropriate is off the table, but your job is to help them understand the **amounts** they should try and stick to health, energy and learning.

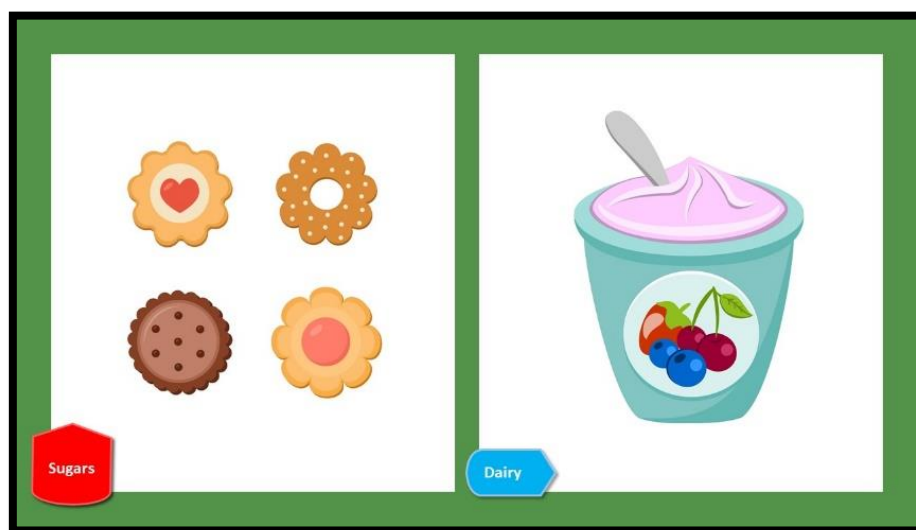
Below is a table of some food types children will be familiar with to discuss in your lesson.

Healthy Carbs (starch)	Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and beans (protein)	Dairy /alternatives (good fats)	Sugars and high saturated fat treats
Bread	Fish	Butter	Ice-cream
Pasta	Chicken	Milk	Biscuits
Wholegrains	Lean Beef mince	Yoghurt	Chocolate
Low sugar cereals	Pork/bacon	Cream	Cakes
Potatoes	Eggs	Cheese	Crisps
Porridge	Nuts and seeds	Soya	Sweets
Bagels	Quorn/ tofu	Cream cheese	Ketchup
Rice	Beans	Olive oil	Crackers

Fruit		Vegetables	
Satsumas	Apples	Carrots	Salad Leaves
Bananas	Pears	Peas	Cucumber
Berries	Oranges	Broccoli	Onions
Melon	Pineapple	Cauliflower	Tomato
Kiwi	Plums	Spinach	Celeriac
Grapes	Avocado	Mushrooms	Butternut Squash
Apricots	Dried Fruits	Cabbage	Peppers

TRY THIS...

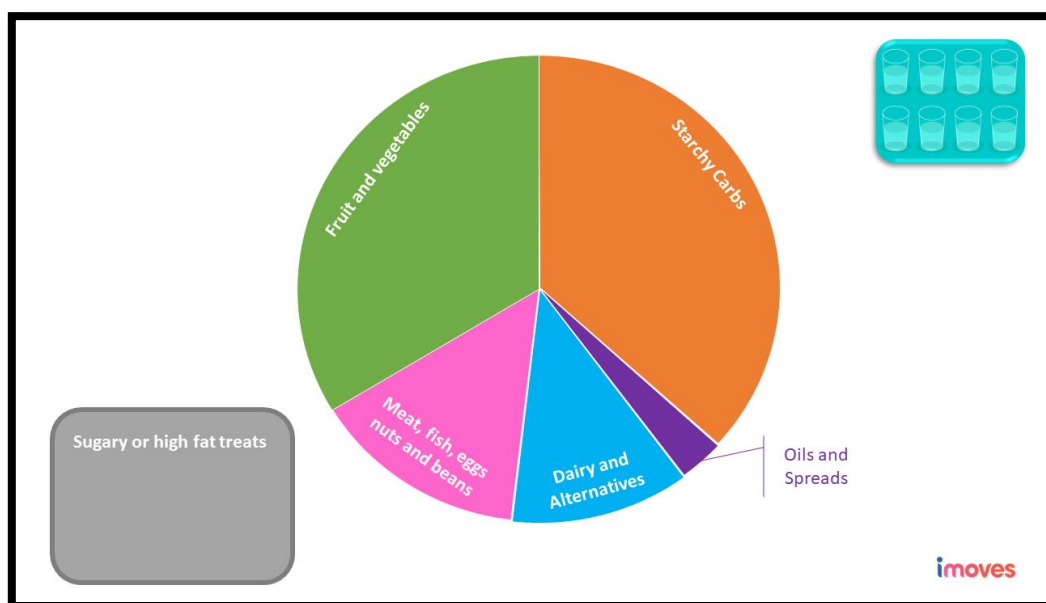
I've seen brilliant results using this idea that involves flashcards featuring different foods that are stuck around the classroom at different heights, under tables and chairs and in places where children will need to stretch to see them clearly. This makes the session fun, active and more memorable.



For younger children 5 - 7 years use flashcards with hints on about the food group they are linked to. For older children remove the hints.

Each child has a **Healthy Food Plate Worksheet** for each child which is below.

Children work together in small groups searching for pictures of the different food groups writing them in or next to the correct section of the plate.



Then use a set of simple PowerPoint slides featuring the Eatwell Guide (GOV.UK) to discuss the type of foods that should be in each food group and the correct amounts.

Talk about the effects that each food group has on their body, making it age appropriate and relevant to them. For example, a 5 year who loves to run fast may be encouraged to eat healthier foods to make their legs stronger and faster. Whereas 10-year-old may want fuel or their brain to help them revise for a test.

Here are some easy key messages for younger children to grasp:

Good carbs like rice, potatoes, pasta and porridge are full of fibre and vitamins. These provide our bodies with lots of slower releasing energy to enable us to learn better and play for longer.

Protein like lean meat, fish, eggs, nuts and beans helps to build a strong body and immune system so we can fight off nasty germs and be faster, stronger and healthier as we grow up.

Good fats like whole milk, full fat cheese and yogurt are also a good source of protein and calcium for strong bones. (Full fat dairy is now known to reduce the risk of diabetes and obesity due to less sugar content than low fat alternatives.)

Fruit and Vegetables are packed full of minerals, vitamins C and fibre that we need **every day** for a healthy heart, a good digestion system and pots of energy.

Try this for younger children aged 5 – 6 years:

- Create a set of flash cards featuring pictures of a variety of foods that are considered healthy. Add in 5 or 6 pictures of foods that should be eaten in small amounts (i.e. sugary, high saturated fat foods).
- Show the children the one picture at a time. Ask them to stand up if they think that food is a healthy option or sit down if they think they should limit the amount of that food they eat.

Try this for younger children aged 6 – 7 years:

- Ask the children to create a healthy meal plan from foods they enjoy.
- Do this in small groups to discuss what they think healthy meal consists of for meals like breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Provide a healthy foods shopping list (example on the next page).

For slightly older children, build on this knowledge to look at foods in great depth. Here are some foods that will help children to focus and retain information and learn more effectively.

Brain Boosting Foods	Effect on our body
Bananas	Improves memory and concentration
Oily fish like salmon	Improves memory, language, creativity and attention
Dark Chocolate	Small amounts boost memory, mood and concentration
Seeds	Improve memory, learning and decision-making
Walnuts	Improve memory and mood
Black and blue berries	Boost short term memory and mental agility
Carrots	Improve memory and brain health
Eggs	Maintains brain health
Grains (whole)	Energy foods for better concentration
Tomatoes	Maintains brain health
Green Veg	Vit K improves brain power and function
Water	Reduces tiredness and keeps you alert

Creative task for older children:

1. Create a ***brain boosting daily meal plan*** to include all the things on the list that they enjoy.
2. Try to avoid too many sugary drinks and snacks.

An example list of foods children could choose from, ideally the foods you discussed earlier in the lesson.

Fruit

Satsumas	Apples
Bananas	Pears
Berries	Oranges
Melon	Pineapple
Kiwi	Plums
Grapes	Avocado
Apricots	Dried Fruits

Vegetables

Carrots	Salad Leaves
Peas	Cucumber
Broccoli	Onions
Cauliflower	Tomato
Spinach	Celeriac
Mushrooms	Butternut Squash
Cabbage	Peppers

Healthy Carbs (starch)

Bread
Pasta
Wholegrains
Cereals
Potatoes
Porridge
Bagels
Rice

Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and beans (protein)

Fish
Chicken
Lean Beef mince
Pork/bacon
Eggs
Nuts and seeds
Quorn/ tofu
Beans

Dairy alternatives (good fats)

Butter
Milk
Yoghurt
Cream
Cheese
Soya
Cream cheese
Olive oil

and Sugars and high saturated fat treats

Ice-cream
Biscuits
Chocolate
Cakes
Crisps
Sweets
Ketchup
Crackers

Always show them a WAGOLL - What A Good One Looks Like, so take them through an age appropriate example meal plan too. Here is a good example below.

Breakfast: 2 boiled eggs and BROWN Toast.

Snack: 1 Banana or SMALL bar of chocolate.

Lunch: Chilli and rice with a side salad or green veg

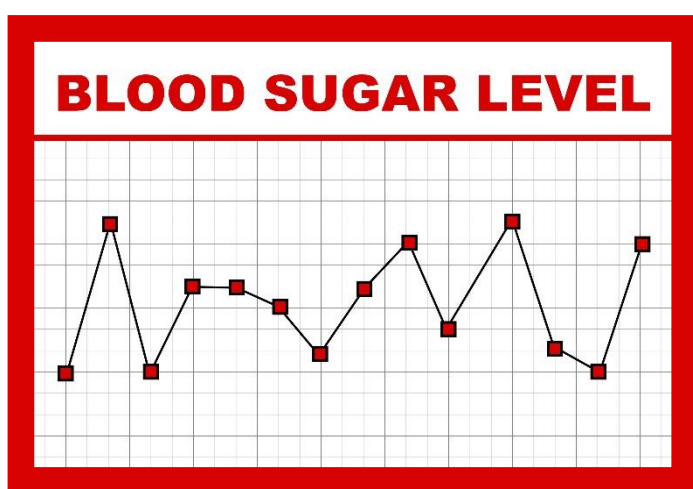
Snack: Nuts and an apple

Evening Meal: Salmon fishcakes with mixed veg. Berries (with yoghurt & honey)

AVOID Blood Sugar Spikes!

Explain that high sugar snacks should be eaten as a treat, 2 small treats per day will be fine. Why? Because too much sugar contributes to:

- Bad and rotting teeth
- Unhealthy weight gain
- Blood sugar lows, fatigue and brain fog
- Poor mental wellbeing such as depression and anxiety



Sugar spikes are caused from sugary food and drinks and are followed by an energy slump and brain fog.

Reasons to Drink More Water



Create the motivation to drink just plain old ordinary water by pointing out age appropriate solutions to concerns that may have. Improving the look and feel of their skin may be appealing to older children, whereas having more energy to play could appeal to younger children.

We get some of our water through fruit and vegetables as they have a high-water content, however drinking at least 1 - 2 litres of water (depending on their age and body size) is necessary to meet daily health requirements.

Now move onto the next chapter where you will learn all about my **step two** which is **using activity for improved health, mood and behavior**.

END

If you have questions or would like to send me your feedback about this chapter, email me at Imogen@imoves.com Ref: Book Chapter 2.

Signing off for now.

Imogen.